

# *The Peripatetic Decade*

## 1880–1890

BOTH PERSONALLY AND INTELLECTUALLY the decade of the eighties was the most important in Kautsky's life. In these years he was married twice and divorced once; his second marriage lasted almost fifty years. He lived for nearly equal periods in Zurich (1880–1882, 1884), Vienna (1882–1883, 1888–1889), and London (1885–1888), and for a short time in the isolated German city of Stuttgart (1883) before settling there in late 1890. During the 1880s, he also established virtually all the major friendships of his life—with Engels, Bebel, Bernstein, Adler, Eleanor Marx, and a variety of Russians, Frenchmen, and other non-Germans. In 1883, the founding of *Die neue Zeit* as the German organ of Marxism gave Kautsky a job (he was primary editor from 1883 to 1917), a regular source of income, and a means through which he could develop and promote his own brand of Marxism. Studying closely with Bernstein in Zurich, under the personal guidance of Engels in London, and through extensive correspondence with both men when separated, Kautsky developed during the eighties from a brash natural-scientific, romantic socialist into a consistent Engelian-Marxist with highly catholic intellectual tastes. Although he was virtually unknown to most socialists outside Austria when he arrived in Zurich in January 1880, by 1890 he was one of the two most prominent presumed heirs to Marx and Engels, and in 1891 he wrote the theoretical portion of the official program of the world's largest socialist workers' party, the SPD.

### Zurich

The move from Vienna to Zurich changed Kautsky's living conditions in many significant ways. For the first time in his life, at age

twenty-six, he was on his own, independent of his immediate family. Höchberg had promised financial support, and Kautsky reported to his parents shortly after his arrival in Zurich that his income would be at least 3,000 marks per year. This more than comfortable sum allowed him to enjoy some of the amenities of cosmopolitan Zurich. One old family friend, writing in rather awkward English, responded to Kautsky's early letters from the Swiss city by observing: "I hear of Spanish wines, and dainties of all countries, which you enjoy, and ladies of all countries with whom you have intercourse. Is this our well-behaved and sober Charles that was?" During the Zurich years, Kautsky acquired the nickname "Baron Juchzer," or "Baron Shout of Joy." The first part stuck with him the rest of his life, apparently derived from the somewhat fastidious dress which distinguished him from many of the more slovenly emigrés. The second part of the nickname referred to Kautsky's exuberance and optimism. Bernstein recalled that many times at the weekly meetings of the Moorish Club, the regular gathering of the German socialist emigrés in Zurich, "Karl Kautsky, a nimble and extremely inventive person, delighted us, when our mood was more than usually extravagant, by irresistibly amusing imitations of acrobats, or as a fantastic dancer."<sup>1</sup>

Zurich was a hotbed of socialist emigrés during the eighties, mostly Germans and Russians. Very few of the exiles had any contact with the Swiss workers, and they tended to form closed, inner-directed groups with their fellow countrymen. In contrast to his experience in Vienna, Kautsky spent most of the time in Zurich in association with non-proletarians. Furthermore, his contacts were usually limited to the intellectuals of the German movement since the politically active, like Bebel, Liebknecht, and others, were protected in Germany by their status as Reichstag representatives and did not have to live in exile. They frequently visited Zurich, however, and as an Austrian, Kautsky was fairly free to travel in Germany and visit the politicians. As a result, given that Austria had no socialists in its parliament until after the turn of the century, Kautsky certainly had more contact with politically active socialists in Zurich than he had had in Vienna. Nevertheless, most of his time was spent in the company of intellectuals who were not active in politics.<sup>2</sup>

Höchberg and Bernstein were the men with whom Kautsky spent the most time. In addition to giving extensive financial support, Höchberg influenced Kautsky in two ways. First, he was the first good editor Kautsky worked with; in contrast to the editors of the *Vorwärts* and the *Volksstaat*, Höchberg conscientiously read and criticized the young Austrian's articles, offering guidance and stimulation for

intellectual development. The brash young Kautsky not only needed such tutoring, he also appreciated it. Second, Höchberg expanded Kautsky's intellectual horizons by introducing him to Herbert Spencer's work and by encouraging him to study practical economics, especially protective tariffs and international labor legislation. Kautsky did write on labor legislation and in 1881 he attended a congress of the International Association for Reform and Codification of National Law in Zurich, hoping to advance the cause of international labor legislation. But a special study of protective tariffs, which Höchberg encouraged Kautsky to undertake in the spring of 1881, was displaced by another topic suggested by Engels: the origins of the family and marriage. In a striking example of his inclinations at the time, he abandoned the study of pressing, extremely practical problems to devote himself to a question of historical and anthropological importance, but of little immediate relevance to the working-class movement. During his first stay in Zurich, Kautsky was not particularly active in emigré discussion groups, though he sometimes gave historical presentations on Ireland and once discussed Socrates. He was much more interested in pursuing intellectual research, and when in early 1881 Liebknecht suggested that Kautsky might be more useful to the movement back in Austria, Karl wrote to Engels that he had "no desire to waste common blows as an agitator."<sup>3</sup>

Of even greater importance than Höchberg to Kautsky's theoretical development during the Zurich years was his very close personal relationship with Eduard Bernstein. Five years Kautsky's senior, and long active in the German movement, he had come to Zurich as Höchberg's private secretary in 1879. Kautsky and Bernstein became friends almost immediately. In a very short time the two were constant companions who worked and studied together, wrote joint letters to Engels, and relaxed and enjoyed themselves together. Having preceded Kautsky to Zurich, Bernstein was able to introduce the younger man to the various groups of emigrés, especially the Russians and the French. And from his participation in party affairs, Bernstein was able to enlighten Kautsky about the finer points and inner workings of the German movement; his experience and personal inclinations made him far superior to Kautsky in political matters. With Bernstein, Kautsky undertook the intense study of Engels' *Anti-Dühring* that finally converted them both to Marxism. What began in Zurich was not simply an association of like-minded individuals, but what Bernstein called "a very close friendship relation and a kind of fighting comradeship," a relationship which led Kautsky to observe that they "became so much of one heart and one soul that we were

considered as a sort of red Orestes and Pylades." Though Kautsky was later to assert in his memoirs that he had learned little of theoretical importance from Bernstein, in fact their development into Marxists was simultaneous and mutual, and the intensity of their personal relationship was precisely what made their break at the turn of the century such a powerful and disturbing event in Kautsky's life.<sup>4</sup>

One of the major activities of the German socialist exiles in Zurich was the publication of the official party newspaper, the *Sozialdemokrat*. Founded late in 1879, after the antisocialist law had all but eliminated the domestic party press, the *Sozialdemokrat* was edited by Georg von Vollmar until his resignation in January 1881. For a time Kautsky was on the verge of being catapulted into prominence in the German movement when he was briefly considered as a potential successor to Vollmar. The task of naming a new editor was Bebel's, and his first inclination was to have Liebknecht take over primary control, writing the lead articles and the political review, with Kautsky handling the correspondence and the technical aspects of editing. By December 1880, however, Bebel had abandoned this plan, and he took Bernstein to London in part to get approval from Marx and Engels of Bernstein's appointment as Vollmar's replacement. Kautsky was not given this prestigious appointment for a variety of reasons, but primarily because Bebel and Engels were not certain that he was altogether to be trusted with such a critical position. Both the older men felt that he lacked sufficient knowledge of German affairs, that he was not particularly adept in his political judgments, and that he was better suited for more theoretical work than was appropriate for the official party newspaper. Engels was unhappy with the "doctrinaire" tone of some of Kautsky's contributions to the *Sozialdemokrat*, and even as late as 1886, he felt that Bernstein was a better political polemicist because he was not a "university man," but a "businessman and, what is not least, [a] Jew. . . . One learns warfare only in wars." Kautsky had also given Bebel the impression that even if offered the editorship he would accept it only temporarily since he hoped to leave Zurich for London and closer study with Marx and Engels. However, Kautsky did give Bernstein a great deal of assistance with the editorial chores, and Kautsky and Liebknecht edited numbers 30-36 of the *Sozialdemokrat* in the late summer of 1881.<sup>5</sup>

Despite his reservations about Kautsky's abilities as a political analyst, Engels recognized that he was an eager and promising disciple. From their very first contact, Engels adopted an attitude toward him that was both encouraging and critical. When Bernstein and Bebel went to London in December 1880, Kautsky sent along with them a copy of his

study, *The Influence of Population Increase on the Progress of Society*, which had just been published in Vienna. Kautsky was seeking the approval of Marx and Engels and also hoped to be recognized as a proponent of the materialist conception of history which he and Bernstein had recently adopted. In a cover letter he professed to Engels, "I wish nothing more than to learn from you." In his reply, Engels was doubtful about the importance of the population study, but responded to Kautsky's expressed desire to come to London for further study: "You are quite right to come here. . . . it has become very necessary for you to come away from the uncritical atmosphere in which the entire current German-produced historical and economic literature decays." This advice—to concentrate even more on abstract historical studies—strongly reinforced Kautsky's personal inclination.<sup>6</sup>

Late in March 1881, Kautsky arrived in England for his first visit to Marx and Engels and the British Museum; he stayed until late June. Though encouraged by Engels' response to his first letter, he was somewhat apprehensive about how he would be received in London since Liebknecht had reported that "the two old ones [Marx and Engels] had not spoken well of" Kautsky. In fact Kautsky and Liebknecht disagreed about the value of visiting London. Bebel thought it useful, but Liebknecht felt that the time would be better spent in Germany in closer contact with the day-to-day movement. Kautsky concluded that Liebknecht did not care much about theoretical development. Despite these slight misgivings, the visit to the old ones was a success. He met mostly with Engels, often for long theoretical discussions, and was invited to attend the Sunday afternoon gatherings at his home. Karl also did some research at the British Museum, just enough to tantalize the source-hungry historian in him and to convince him of the need to spend a longer period in London. He made a second visit in 1884, before settling there for over three years beginning in 1885.<sup>7</sup>

Kautsky saw little of Marx during his first visit, and did not make a very good impression on him. Marx wrote this evaluation shortly after their first meeting: "Engels too has taken a much milder view of this Kautsky since he proved himself a very talented drinker. . . . He is a mediocrity with a small-minded outlook, superwise (only 26), very conceited, industrious in a certain sort of way, he busies himself a lot with statistics but does not read anything very clever out of them, belongs by nature to the tribe of the philistines but is otherwise a decent fellow in his own way. I turn him over to friend E[ngels] as much as possible." Marx died before Kautsky's second visit, and the two men never got to know one another very well. On the other hand, Kautsky's

relationship with Engels became much closer in the next decade, at least in part because they both enjoyed tipping. On his second trip to London, Kautsky arrived on Engels' birthday and proceeded to overdo the celebration with champagne, only to awake next day to a hangover and a postcard from Engels asking if Kautsky had managed to make it safely back to his hotel.<sup>8</sup>

Engels' evaluation of Kautsky after their first meeting was not as harsh as Marx's, but Engels realized that Kautsky was not well suited to be a political writer and continued to feel that he needed a great deal more experience before he could become a major intellectual figure in the Marxian movement. In a letter written while Kautsky was still in London, Engels complimented Bernstein on the tone adopted by the *Sozialdemokrat* and added that Bernstein should not feel himself ill equipped for the editorship because of his lack of formal education. Engels argued that the proper tone for a political journal is not that of "erudition," but of being able to grasp the essence of a situation quickly. "That, for example, Kautsky would not be able to do," Engels continued, "he always has too many secondary points of view. Certainly that is good for longer review articles, but on a newspaper where one must make up one's mind quickly, often one cannot see the forest for the trees, and that must not happen in a party organ." A few months later, Engels observed to Bebel that though Kautsky was "an extremely good fellow," he was also "a born pedant and hair-splitter in whose hands the complicated questions do not become simple, but the simple complicated."<sup>9</sup> By 1883, Engels was still pessimistic about the younger generation of Marxian theoreticians: "In the theoretical work I still as yet do not see who will replace me and M[arx]. What the young [ones] have tried is worth little, mostly even less than nothing. Kautsky, the only one who studies industriously, must write in order to live, and can therefore certainly produce nothing."<sup>10</sup>

The need to write in order to live began to bear down on Kautsky again shortly after his return from London in 1881. In mid-November, Höchberg suffered personal financial difficulties which forced a reduction in support for Kautsky. The two men had already begun to move apart theoretically; as early as 1880, Höchberg was uncomfortable with the Marxism of both Kautsky and Bernstein, and by 1881 Kautsky and Höchberg specifically disagreed on the question of whether or not Germany should establish colonies. Kautsky argued against colonies, Höchberg in favor of them. But despite these differences, Höchberg had remained generous to the young Marxists, paying for trips to London, financing book publication, and providing regular support. In his memoirs Kautsky paid high tribute to



Höchberg for his generous and selfless support. By April 1882, however, Kautsky felt that he had to leave Zurich: Höchberg was withdrawing support not only from him personally, but also from the *Sozialdemokrat* and most of the other literary projects he had helped finance.<sup>11</sup>

### The Founding of *Die neue Zeit*

Having decided to leave Switzerland, Kautsky once again faced the necessity of making a living, and this necessity dictated where he would go. His fondest wish was to move to London, but first consideration had to be given to the matter of money, so he returned to Vienna, thinking his chances of gaining a regular income there were better than in London. Things had not improved in the socialist movement during his absence. State repression was as extensive as ever, the anarchists with whom he had so recently flirted had grown much stronger, and the number of socialists working for an organized, politically oriented movement had shrunk to a minimum. Because of his association with the *Sozialdemokrat* in Zurich, Kautsky returned to Vienna with considerably more prestige, or notoriety, than he had had earlier. He frequently found himself pushed into positions of leadership among those who favored the German type of party and close ties with the German movement. After an uncharacteristically modest recognition of the need to orient himself on recent developments before writing on them, Kautsky entered the fray on the side of those urging organization for political ends. He reacted very sharply to the anarchists' rejection of demands for a general franchise, arguing that "one can hardly push nonsense further," and harshly condemned anarchist violence, which he felt only aided the opponents of the workers' movement. In contrast to his less certain position on political questions when he left Vienna in 1880, Kautsky now justified political organization as the only way to give future direction to the movement. In October 1882, he attended a socialist party congress in Brünn, where he was called upon to draft a new party program on very short notice. Drawing from his memory of the program Marx had drafted for the Frenchman Jules Guesde in 1880, Kautsky wrote out brief proposals that called for struggle by all means that recognized the rights of the people, that is, excluding terrorism. This program later served as the basis of the Hainfeld program of 1888, which finally united Austrian socialism under Victor Adler's leadership.<sup>12</sup>

Despite his increased activity and importance in the Austrian party, Kautsky was not happy in Vienna. The movement was still tiny and

harassed, and he had experienced the excitement of the much larger, more interesting, though no less harassed, German party. He had also acquired a taste for historical research and for close contacts with Marxian intellectuals. Vienna seemed far from the action, and oppressive. He received his letters at a cover address and had to use the same subterfuge in writing to Engels, lest their correspondence be confiscated by the imperial police. His isolation from intellectually stimulating comrades led him to write long, involved letters to Engels on a variety of theoretical and political subjects. When Engels could not find time to respond in kind, Kautsky was stung by what he felt was rejection by his chosen mentor. Only intercession by Bernstein and reassurances from Engels that the problem was simply lack of time stilled Kautsky's discomfort. Furthermore, he had not found employment. The Austrian socialist press could not provide sufficient support, so he had to look elsewhere.<sup>13</sup>

As early as June 1882, Kautsky began negotiations to establish the world's first scholarly journal devoted to the explication and propagation of Marxism. Working closely with Liebknecht and the German socialist editor J. H. W. Dietz, to whom he was introduced by Bernstein, he hoped to found a journal that was not subsidized by the party and was free to promote Marxism within the rapidly growing German movement. Dietz was essential to the project because a publisher was needed who was ideologically inclined to take the financial and political risks involved in publishing such a journal in Germany under the antisocialist law. Correspondence with Dietz did not begin until August, but by September negotiations had advanced far enough to necessitate a personal meeting. In October, Dietz, Bebel, Liebknecht, Kautsky, and, much to Kautsky's irritation, Liebknecht's son-in-law, Bruno Geiser, met in Salzburg to conclude the arrangements. Kautsky contributed 2,000 marks to the venture as did his Viennese friend, Heinrich Braun, with Dietz assuming financial responsibility for the remainder. *Die neue Zeit*, the name agreed upon for the new journal, was to be of moderate length, to cost fifty pfennig, and to appear monthly beginning 1 January 1883. Officially it was not a party publication, though the presence of Bebel and Liebknecht at this founding meeting meant that the *Neue Zeit* would be closely tied to an important segment of the party. Liebknecht was designated a permanent contributor, and Dietz, Liebknecht, and Kautsky comprised the editorial board. Kautsky was clearly to assume primary responsibility for the regular editorial tasks and receive a salary for his work; the *Neue Zeit* was his journal.<sup>14</sup>

At the time of the establishment of the *Neue Zeit*, the German socialist



movement was dividing into two groups, the moderates and the radicals. Such an internal division had existed since the founding of the party and would continue until after World War I, but under the antisocialist law tensions between the two groups were particularly acute. The moderates were led by most of the Social Democratic *Fraktion* of the Reichstag, which had assumed de facto leadership of the party immediately after the beginning of the antisocialist law and was officially endorsed in this capacity by the party's 1880 Wyden congress. They tended to play down the class nature of the movement, tried to avoid antagonizing the hostile government by avoiding revolutionary rhetoric, and emphasized piecemeal reform, social and political integration of their followers, and the need to recognize the strength of their opposition. Though disgusted by the injustices perpetrated on the lower classes in Germany and uncomfortable with Bismarck's autocratic state, the moderates in the party *Fraktion* concentrated on working within the system and expanding the party's appeal to sectors of the population other than the industrial working class. To the limited extent that they were theoretical, the moderates were eclectic and Lassallean; they represented the petit bourgeois, democratic roots of German socialism. The radicals, who were represented in the *Fraktion* only by Bebel, an often unreliable Liebknecht, and, until 1884, by Vollmar, emphasized the class nature of both the German state and their own party. They seemed at times to relish the pariah status of socialists and spoke more boldly of the need for fundamental change and vaguely of some sort of impending revolution. The major strength of the radicals lay in the intellectuals of the movement, headed by the exiled *Sozialdemokrat* and those surrounding it, especially Vollmar, Bernstein, Kautsky, and Bebel. These men all identified themselves in varying degrees as followers of Marx and Engels, though in fact none but Bernstein and Kautsky had very clear notions of what constituted Marxism.<sup>15</sup>

Much of the debate between the radicals and moderates centered on the material published in the *Sozialdemokrat*. Quite sensibly the moderates of the *Fraktion* argued that if they were going to be held accountable for what appeared in the official party journal, they should have some say over its contents. On the other hand, the radicals felt that the moderates of the *Fraktion* were not necessarily representative of the majority of the party since they were elected by their Reichstag constituencies and were not the elected leaders of the party. The radicals doggedly fought against efforts to muzzle the rhetoric of the *Sozialdemokrat*. Kautsky had participated in this dispute while in Zurich, and after the establishment of the *Neue Zeit* he found himself

even more embroiled in what was a long and at times extremely acrimonious fight.

Kautsky's intentions concerning the *Neue Zeit* were clear from the beginning—it was to be a journal of scientific socialism, of Marxism. In 1883, Liebknecht was closely identified with the old ones in London. Kautsky recalled much later that at that time in the party many held that "Marx [was] Allah and Liebknecht his prophet." Liebknecht's participation in the *Neue Zeit* announced its Marxist orientation in a way that Kautsky's name as yet could not. When Bernstein hinted that Engels might contribute an article on Darwin to the first number, Kautsky was ecstatic: "I could think of no better introductory article for a popular monthly than one on Darwin. The name alone is already a program." Though in the end Engels did not do this article, Kautsky devoted much of the space in the first year of the *Neue Zeit* to discussion of evolutionary theory and the development of social instincts in humans. Marx and Darwin were to be the twin pillars on which the *Neue Zeit* rested, and Kautsky obviously saw the two as a natural pair. He outlined his hopes for the new journal as follows: "We want to handle all science as well as art and anything of public interest. Only daily politics should be excluded. . . . We want to popularize knowledge, to enlighten the workers." While this plan may sound insipid enough in a political sense, he felt that his new journal would strengthen the hand of the radicals in their dispute with the moderates. In fact, despite his disinclination to participate actively in the politics of the socialist movement, he constantly felt compelled to engage in the polemics of the political disputes because he felt that his theoretical critique would help combat the moderate faction during the 1880s.<sup>16</sup>

Because he was an intellectual, Kautsky interpreted the moderate-radical split in theoretical terms. He argued that the moderates were representatives of petit bourgeois socialism—their doctrines were "Dühring-Louis Blancist philistinism." Within the *Fraktion* the Marxists were effectively represented only by Bebel; Geiser was the leader of the petit bourgeois tendency (and thus Kautsky's distress at having Geiser present at the *Neue Zeit* organizational meeting); Wilhelm Bloß was a personal opponent of Marx; Vollmar, though a radical, was unclear theoretically; and the rest of the *Fraktion* was composed of good men, but not Marxists. Kautsky urged Engels to attack these petit bourgeois socialists, fearing that their activities, if not countered, would make a split inevitable. What particularly incensed him about conditions in the German movement was that party leadership devolved upon the *Fraktion* which was dominated by the so-called educated. The moderate Reichstag deputies of the party,

Geiser, Blos, Frohme, and others, were not the ones the party members would elect to the central committee if they were free to vote. Kautsky insisted that these petit bourgeois, educated moderates had no influence among the party rank-and-file and no mass support among the workers. Nonetheless, they had to be combated because they could mislead the workers and eventually provoke a split. In outlining to Engels his objections to the petit bourgeois socialists in the party, Kautsky tied political and theoretical positions together: "It is peculiar that almost all the educated of the party belong to this tendency, even if they are not in contact with one another; *unconsciously* they arrive at the same ideas. They are all enthusiastic about colonies, the national idea, further revival of German antiquity, complete trust of cooperation with the government, replacement of the class struggle through the power of 'justice,' denial of materialism and the materialist conception of history—Marxist dogma, as they call it—and raving insults to Manchesterism, which is already long dead."<sup>17</sup>

For the first year the *Neue Zeit* avoided entering directly into party disputes, concentrating instead on scientific and historical topics. But during this year, several changes took place in Kautsky's living conditions that eventually brought him directly into the conflict. First, shortly after the initial number of the *Neue Zeit* appeared, Dietz began to pressure Kautsky to move from Vienna to Stuttgart, where Dietz's publishing facilities were located, in order to ease the task of editing the new journal. Though Kautsky had not expected to leave Vienna at that time, he did move to Stuttgart in April 1883, shortly after his marriage to Louise Strasser. But Stuttgart was provincial and isolated, and Kautsky was very unhappy with its lack of research resources and its distance from the centers of socialist activity. He reported to Engels that a brief visit to Bernstein in Zurich was like going to an oasis in the midst of a desert, and that Bebel's brief stays in Stuttgart were likewise invigorating. "I went to Germany to get to know the German movement," he complained, "but in Swabia, at least, I only find many philistines." Second, Kautsky quickly discovered that the income from editing the *Neue Zeit* was not sufficient to live on, especially for two people. The original agreement with Dietz provided Kautsky with 250 marks per month (equal to the 3,000 marks Höchberg had provided in 1880-1881), but in order to ease the financial squeeze of the first year, Kautsky would only accept 150 marks. From this he had to pay editorial costs such as postage, subscriptions, and office supplies, which amounted to about 30 marks per month, leaving Karl and Louise only 30 marks per week to live on. In order to supplement his income, Kautsky went to Zurich to try to get a position as a regular contributor

to the *Zurich Post*. But on his return, the Stuttgart police suggested that, as a foreigner, he must expect to be deported if he continued to make suspicious trips to Zurich and Vienna. He then decided to leave Stuttgart, and, though he would have preferred to go to London permanently, he settled for a brief visit there before moving once again to Zurich in January 1884.<sup>18</sup>

The move satisfied Kautsky's desire to be closer to the center of socialist activity, but it also endangered his control over the *Neue Zeit* and plunged him deep into the moderate-radical dispute. When he left Stuttgart, Dietz needed someone on the spot to tend to the mundane, day-to-day tasks of editing. Unfortunately, he chose Blos and Geiser. The choice could not have been worse had it been calculated to offend, and eventually Kautsky very reluctantly concluded that perhaps Blos and Geiser had been chosen to give offense. The problem began in May 1884 and centered on Blos's political review column for that month. Kautsky was infuriated, not only by the content of the piece, which included praise for the Austrian government's position on the "normal work day" without pointing out the autocratic character of that government, but even more by the assault on the major premise of the *Neue Zeit* that such an article represented. Kautsky contended that from the very beginning the "anti-Marxist gentlemen in Germany" had been after the *Neue Zeit* "because it is in fact the only socialist newspaper in Germany that stands on Marxian grounds." He felt that the moderates had worked through, and even with, Dietz to take over the journal: "Now the results of this intrigue are becoming evident. The imposition of the political review by Blos was merely the first stage. Now Dietz goes further and demands that Blos should become a *responsible editor* of the *Neue Zeit*." To Dietz, Kautsky wrote that he would gladly work with or under Liebknecht, but never with Blos. He demanded an end to Blos's influence on the *Neue Zeit* and threatened to withdraw from the journal rather than see it made into "an organ of Geiser's clique. . . . It is better that the NZ should go under honorably than fall into the hands of the Geiserists."<sup>19</sup>

The resolution of this conflict is very interesting because it marks the emergence of the alliance between the theory of Kautsky and the politics of Bebel. When he first protested to Dietz, Kautsky was not especially hopeful that the matter would be resolved in his favor. Since he and Dietz obviously disagreed, the decision would rest with Liebknecht as the third member of the editorial board. Kautsky feared that if Dietz brought Geiser to the conference on Blos's role on the *Neue Zeit*, Geiser would influence Liebknecht to side with Blos and Dietz. During the first week of June, Bebel also entered into the dispute by

protesting to Dietz about the inclusion of the work of Geiser and Bloss in the *Neue Zeit*. Backed by Bebel, and as a result of Bebel's intervention, by Liebknecht also, in late June Kautsky was able to announce an almost complete victory to Engels. Dietz agreed to drop the political review and claimed that Bloss would no longer have any influence on the journal. Liebknecht was also supporting Kautsky's continued demand for a retraction of the position espoused by Bloss.<sup>20</sup>

Bebel had decided that Kautsky's theoretical opposition to the moderates would help in the political struggle against them. One part of Kautsky's assault was an article that sharply attacked Rodbertus, a German economist and favorite of the moderates. While Rodbertus was a harsh critic of capitalism, he was also intensely loyal to the Bismarckian Reich. Bebel recognized the importance of attacking the moderates on this ground, and he suggested to Dietz that Kautsky's article be reprinted as a separate pamphlet. Bebel also felt that he was being unfairly attacked in the *Neue Welt*, which was edited by Geiser and published by Dietz. To Kautsky, Bebel explained that he had told Dietz "that the two tendencies of the party are quite precisely expressed in the *Neue Welt* and in the *Neue Zeit*, and just for that reason the *Neue Zeit* cannot be dropped." Bebel clearly identified himself with the tendency associated with the *Neue Zeit*.<sup>21</sup>

Following Bebel's lead, Kautsky also saw two tendencies in the party, those for the *Neue Zeit* and those against it. Of the latter he said: "Marxism, the conception of our party as the organization of the proletariat fighting the class struggle, is in these circles everywhere hated or at least not understood." He also realized that the preservation of his own position with the *Neue Zeit*, as well as Bernstein's job with the *Sozialdemokrat*, depended on Bebel's support. Kautsky and Bebel were to operate in tandem—the one in theory, the other in politics and party affairs—for many years in the future.<sup>22</sup>

Bebel's support won the battle but not the war, at least not yet. Only three days after announcing victory to Engels, Kautsky reported that Dietz was beginning to make noises about impending bankruptcy and the impossibility of supporting the chronic deficit of the *Neue Zeit*. Bernstein agreed with Kautsky that this was a political decision on Dietz's part, because the *Neue Welt*, which had an even greater deficit than the *Neue Zeit*, was not going to be dropped. Bernstein also suggested that in this matter Dietz was being influenced by Geiser, who was supported by Liebknecht. Engels' response to the announcement of the possible end of the *Neue Zeit* must have come as quite a shock to Kautsky and the rest of the radicals: "That the *Neue Zeit* should end is no catastrophe for the party." Engels argued that under the

antisocialist law there was little the journal could do about the intraparty conflict, because under the law the moderates "can speak out entirely unhindered, [while] we are restrained by what gives them cover."<sup>23</sup>

The original plan of the *Neue Zeit* had been to deal theoretically and historically with everything but daily politics so as to avoid prosecution under the antisocialist law while advancing the cause of scientific socialism. But even on this level the Marxists sometimes found it difficult to toe the line. In April 1884, Engels and Kautsky had agreed that a proper critique of Lewis Morgan's *Ancient Society* (1877) could not appear in the *Neue Zeit* because Morgan's concluding chapter on private property as the source of class conflicts could not be discussed in a manner compatible with the law. As the *Neue Zeit* became more involved in party disputes, Kautsky too began to feel restrained, particularly when he wanted to write on things like the colonial question and the "right to work" concept. But he was not willing to give up his journal because he felt it was the "only newspaper in Germany which stands fully and completely on Marxist ground." Bebel agreed and convinced Dietz to continue publication. He also got Dietz to stop talking about a further reduction in Kautsky's pay for editing the *Neue Zeit* and to assume postal costs for the journal.<sup>24</sup>

By June 1884, Kautsky had decided to leave Zurich for London in order to pursue his historical studies, to renew personal contacts with Engels, and to supplement his still too meager income by contributing to English journals and serving as English correspondent for continental socialist papers. The Blos-Geiser controversy delayed announcement of this decision, but reinforced his desire to leave. By October, even before the fate of the *Neue Zeit* had been decided for certain, he announced to Bebel his determination to go to London. Bebel and Dietz gave their approval, though the latter doubted that Kautsky would be any happier in London than he was in Zurich. Liebknecht was not so eager to agree, arguing that Kautsky would be lost for Germany if he moved to London. Kautsky argued back: "But what does it mean to lose touch with Germany? To be moved away from the party troubles and petty fights in order to win a viewpoint from which one can perceive the development of Germany not from the condition of one or another electoral district, but in relationship to the total development of modern humanity. And to capture this viewpoint is in my opinion the task of the *Neue Zeit*."<sup>25</sup>

The withdrawal to London ended for almost five years Kautsky's personal involvement with the infighting of the German party, reflecting his feeling that "I am more skillful with my pen than with my



mouth." Kautsky saw his task as one of propaganda, of advancing the cause of scientific socialism. He dedicated the *Neue Zeit* to bringing "people to consciousness of what Marxism is and what it is not." He rebutted the attacks of the moderates by declaring that such a position was "not narrow-minded dogmatism, . . . but clarity and consciousness of direction as opposed to the uncritical opportunist eclecticism which today is the fashion in the party." Kautsky felt that he was best equipped to be a propagandist from a distance, not a political activist and an organizer. But he did not see that by drawing away from the political arena he lost touch, not just with Germany, but with the pressures and problems that confronted the day-to-day movement. In his desire to serve theory better, he lost touch with practice. After a brief visit to Vienna and a stop in Berlin, Karl and Louise arrived in London in late January 1885.<sup>26</sup>

### London

The London years yielded much of the work that established Kautsky as a leading Marxist theoretician. In close contact with Engels and the magnificent resources of the British Museum, and freed from the time-consuming squabbles of the German movement, he concentrated on history and economics. Thanks to the generosity of a wealthy supporter and to his own capacity for work, he was able to live fairly comfortably in London, even though expenses were greater there than in Stuttgart or Vienna. The wealthy backer this time was Heinrich Spiegler, brother-in-law of Karl's Viennese friend Heinrich Braun. From shortly after his arrival in London until his final return to Germany in 1890, Kautsky received the equivalent of about 100 marks (£5 sterling) per month from Spiegler. This income, plus the 150 marks from the *Neue Zeit* and the honoraria collected from contributions to other journals, allowed the Kautskys to enjoy England. The honoraria were sometimes quite handsome, as in March 1887, when he received 55 marks for an article which appeared in Adler's *Die Gleichheit* in Vienna. Though on at least one occasion he was forced to ask Engels for a loan when the regular monthly payments were disrupted, by 1885 the problem of a regular and sufficient income had largely been solved. In addition to his literary work, Kautsky also served as agent for his father's efforts to sell original stage designs to English theater architects. Apparently he was not especially attentive in this work. The Kautsky archives in Amsterdam contain seventeen letters to Karl, covering just under a year, from one Walter Emden, architect, and Emden's secretary, which are requests, rerequests, and

demands for responses to letters, for translations of stage designs, and other matters of business.<sup>27</sup>

Although much more detached from party problems than before, Kautsky did not entirely escape intraparty disputes by moving to London. One particular problem, which plagued him for a long time, concerned his co-workers on the *Neue Zeit*. Having successfully turned back one effort by the moderates to establish Blos on the regular staff and a suggestion by Dietz that still another moderate Reichstag representative, Louis Viereck, work on the journal, Kautsky tried to find someone he trusted theoretically to take on some of the work. He was perfectly willing to give space to non-Marxian writers, but objected to having any but the doctrinally safe do editorial jobs. Ironically, the first person Kautsky suggested as acceptable to him was Georg von Vollmar. Although at the time Vollmar was still considered a radical, he was beginning to move away from the rest of the radicals and soon became one of the most outspoken proponents of peasant-based reformism in the SPD. Vollmar and Kautsky eventually engaged in long polemics over the questions of state socialism and appealing to the peasantry. Fortunately for the journal's radical, Marxist reputation, Kautsky's suggestion that Vollmar contribute regularly as German correspondent was vetoed by Dietz. Bebel, too, had been lukewarm on Vollmar's appointment.<sup>28</sup>

The problem of an acceptable co-worker became even more acute during the spring of 1885, when the moderates of the *Fraktion* supported the government's bill authorizing subsidies for German steamships operating in African and Asian waters. The radicals, led by Bebel in Germany and Bernstein and the *Sozialdemokrat* among the exiled intellectuals, vigorously condemned this explicit support for the hated capitalist system and Bismarck's government. When the *Fraktion* moderates demanded control over what Bernstein printed in the *Sozialdemokrat*, a split within the party seemed certain for a time. In this conflict, Kautsky followed Engels' lead in arguing that the issue was not sufficient cause for the radicals to force a break, that Liebknecht, not Bernstein should answer the moderates' attacks on the *Sozialdemokrat*, and that above all Bernstein should not give up the paper. His reasoning on this last point reflected his convictions about the nature of the German party and its press and their relationship to the political representatives elected as Social Democrats. Kautsky wrote to Bernstein: "Just because you do not have the trust of the *Fraktion*, you must remain. You are not the *Vertrauensmann* of the *Fraktion*, but the *Vertrauensmann* of the party." Engels also advised Bebel to hold onto

the *Sozialdemokrat* and the *Neue Zeit*, the only journals that the radicals (or "we," as Engels wrote) held.<sup>29</sup>

Engels and Bebel were both very willing to recognize Kautsky as an ally in political matters by the mid-1880s, but both still harbored reservations about the younger man. Engels was sometimes not certain that, "as an Austrian," Kautsky was capable of fully understanding the subtle nuances of German politics. Bebel still felt in 1885 that Kautsky had a tendency to judge situations too quickly, without careful reflection. Significantly, when in late December of that year he felt the need for another attack against pro-Rodbertus, pro-Lassalle forces in the party, especially against Louis Viereck, Bebel's first choice to lead the attack was Bernstein. If not Bernstein, then he hoped that Kautsky would take on the task with Engels' assistance. In fact, neither Bernstein nor Kautsky wrote the article. Bernstein was too busy, and Kautsky felt too restrained by the antisocialist law. He thought that he could safely print such an article only if it was limited to a theoretical discussion, which, while "more innocuous," was also "more difficult, [and] for the masses more uninteresting." Despite the difficulties and reservations, Engels, Bebel, and Kautsky were fundamentally in agreement on social democratic politics in the 1880s. When Bebel was imprisoned in 1886 for having attended the illegal Copenhagen party congress of 1883, Kautsky feared that his absence left no one to protect "the gentlemen of the *Fraktion* from making fools of themselves." And Engels and Bebel both fully agreed with Kautsky's view of Bloss and the other moderates. In the spring of 1890, Engels and Kautsky jointly protested to Bebel about unauthorized changes Bloss had made in a *Neue Zeit* article by Engels on Russian foreign policy. In his reply to Engels, Bebel called Bloss "*ein Schwachmatiker und ein Waschlappen*" ("an ignoramus and a sissy"), thus fully endorsing Kautsky's own aversion to Bloss.<sup>30</sup>

On 14 June 1888, to the surprise, and eventually shock, of almost all their acquaintances, Karl and Louise Kautsky, accompanied by Karl's brother Hans, left London. Though ostensibly on their way to St. Gilgen, Switzerland, for a summer vacation, in fact Karl and Louise went to Vienna to get a divorce. When news of the real purpose of the trip reached London, Germany, and Zurich, condemnation of Kautsky was almost universal. Adler, Bebel, the Liebknechts, Tussy (Eleanor) Marx, and others, all but Bernstein, who had been closest to the Kautskys, were very severe in their judgment. Of all of Kautsky's friends, Engels was by far the most strongly affected; he had developed a sincere affection for Louise and felt that Karl was treating her very shabbily. In his first letter to Kautsky following news of the impending

divorce. Engels was bewildered and very surprised. He cautioned Kautsky to consider how much harder on the woman than the man divorce was. To Bebel, Engels wrote: "The history of the Kautskys has astonished us all. Louise has conducted herself with unusual heroism in the entire thing. K was in a drunken frenzy. . . . I have written to [him] that it was the stupidest trick of his life."<sup>31</sup>

The divorce created hard feelings and a measure of personal bitterness on both sides. Not surprisingly, Kautsky staunchly defended his own innocence in the matter, but generally he was not eager to discuss the details with most of his correspondents. To Bebel, Kautsky wrote that he regretted that he had not controlled himself better upon first meeting Louise, because he finally realized that he had never loved her. Though unhappy about the divorce, Kautsky claimed that he did not feel guilty. He also contended that the split was not so sudden, that he was not so fickle or irresponsible as Bebel might think. "What has taken place so astonishingly quickly," Karl wrote, "has developed for more than a year, and others, such as Ede [Bernstein], are in no way so unexpectedly affected as you." Much later Kautsky felt that most of his friends, except Engels, eventually recognized that Louise was not as blameless as many had assumed in 1888-1889; Tussy Marx especially learned to hate Louise passionately. In a footnote to a letter from Engels that predicted Karl would one day regret the split with Louise, Kautsky commented, "This day never occurred."<sup>32</sup>

Divorce was a long process in Vienna, and Kautsky was not able to return to London until October 1889. During that time Engels tried diligently to bring about a reconciliation between Karl and Louise. He also continued to correspond with Kautsky on theoretical and party matters, but frequently had a difficult time keeping his personal disappointment with Kautsky from influencing their intellectual relationship. For his part, Kautsky was at times less than frank with Engels about the possibility of a reconciliation. In late January 1889, Engels proposed that Kautsky prepare, "with the help of your wife," the fourth volume of Marx's *Capital* for publication. He offered payment of £50 per year, asserting that Kautsky could prepare the 750 pages in about two years by "dictating to your wife." Though Kautsky was pleased with the offer, he hedged on accepting and suggested that perhaps both he and Bernstein should work on the project. He explained that his return to London would have to be delayed as he was not well, that he wished to remain in touch with Austrian party activities for a few months, and in addition, Louise was taking a midwifery course that would not be completed for a time. Kautsky did not mention that the divorce proceedings required his

presence in Vienna; in fact he implied that he may have changed his mind about the divorce and that he and Louise would return to London together. Eventually Engels reluctantly accepted the divorce, and in 1890 he offered Louise a position in his home as housekeeper-secretary, a move Karl approved and encouraged.<sup>33</sup>

Engels and Kautsky never reestablished the close relationship that had prevailed before the divorce. Although the two men met often between 1890 and Engels' death and remained in frequent correspondence, sharing news and gossip as of old, Engels' affection for Louise and his distress with Karl's actions prevented a return to the previous warm friendship. In 1892, they had a very long and at times bitter feud when Kautsky asked Engels to get Louise to sign her literary productions Strasser-Kautsky, or in some other manner than just Louise Kautsky. Although he was probably influenced by his mother, Kautsky's request was simple enough and probably quite innocent of any ulterior intent, but sensitivity and mistrust on the part of the aging Engels converted the simple request into a cause. His first response was to side openly with Louise, calling her "my own child," and implying that the divorce had been Kautsky's doing, so Kautsky would just have to live with the consequences. Kautsky defended his original request and denied that he had intended Louise any ill will, but Engels would not hear of it. In a very nasty letter, Engels mocked the pretensions that made Kautsky think every female who published under the name Kautsky must be his wife or mother and concluded, "By your unreasonable demand you hurt Louise deeply, I fear more deeply than you can again put right." Kautsky continued to profess his innocence of offense to Louise, but also persisted in his request for the name change. In the end Louise did not change her name until 1894, when she married Ludwig Freyberger, a Viennese doctor. But Kautsky's relationship with Engels had been further undermined by this episode.<sup>34</sup>

Following Engels' death in 1895, Kautsky was very much surprised to find that he had not been named an executor of Engels' literary remains. Engels had complained bitterly in his last letter to Kautsky about not being included in Kautsky and Bernstein's *History of Socialism* project, but the protest had a false ring and probably had little to do with Kautsky's exclusion as an executor. The project was begun in 1886, and though neither Kautsky nor Bernstein had ever directly asked Engels to participate—according to Kautsky because they assumed he was too busy with the third volume of *Capital*—that Engels could have failed to even hear about the *History* for over eight years was impossible. Almost certainly in the last years of his life Engels turned

against Kautsky because of bitterness over Karl's supposed mistreatment of Louise. Quite likely Louise also played a more direct role in the disposition of Engels' will. Adler and Bebel combined forces to try to get Louise to influence Engels to leave Marx's literary remains, which were in Engels' possession, to the German party rather than to Marx's children. This rather devious plan was only partially successful, but Louise could well have urged Engels to prevent Kautsky from having access to things as well. Engels would have been receptive to such suggestions, and the results strongly suggest this possibility.<sup>35</sup>

Kautsky returned to London after his divorce, but stayed only a brief time. Late in 1889, he learned from Dietz of the latter's intention to convert the *Neue Zeit* from a monthly into a weekly with the lapsing of the antisocialist law. Dietz insisted that the increased work load demanded Kautsky's constant presence in Stuttgart, and rather than taking a chance on losing "the most capable, intelligent, and decent" of publishers, Kautsky agreed to return to Stuttgart. In part he was encouraged by Dietz's offer to raise the salary for editing the journal to 3,000 marks per year. In March 1890, he left London for Vienna. While there, he married for the second and last time. His new bride was Luise Ronsperger, a young friend of his mother's whom Kautsky had met in 1888, and to whom he was closely attached by the summer of 1889. Kautsky declared his love and proposed marriage to Luise in December of that year: "I live by my pen and stand in the opposition. . . . I am no agitator, but a private scholar, and I am in the pleasant position of being able to say that the most difficult time, the beginning, lies behind me. Today I have a name, if not in Austria then in Germany, where my public lives; my works are not merely read, but, what is far more important from the standpoint of a household, bought also." On 9 April, after delaying to the last moment, Kautsky announced his impending marriage in a letter to Engels. He defended Luise by explaining that "after almost 10 years as a manager of a confectioner's shop, [she] has certainly gained experience with real life, but has not become a philistine." Kautsky was certain that he and Luise would be compatible since "she knows and shares my views, and a comprehensive general education makes it possible for her to acquire an understanding of my work." A few days later, the two were married, and in late August they moved to Germany, where they remained until 1924.<sup>36</sup>

### Literary Works of the 1880s

When Kautsky arrived in Zurich in January 1880, he was still primarily a romantic, natural-scientific socialist. By the time he moved



to London, almost exactly five years later, he was a convinced Marxist of the Engelian vein, and by his return to Germany in 1890, he was probably the leading theoretician of the SPD. The process of conversion was long and marked by theoretical and analytical inconsistencies at many points. Kautsky's brand of Marxism always bore traces of his earlier natural-scientific bent, though to a great extent by 1885 overt appeals to biological or naturalistic explanations were replaced by an emphasis on historical, social, and economic determinants. The persistent natural-scientific qualities of Kautsky's Marxism were not just the product of his earlier inclinations, but resulted from an interaction of these inclinations with the views expressed in Engels' *Anti-Dühring*. A *Weltanschauung* derived from the works of Haeckel, Büchner, Buckle, and Darwin made Kautsky particularly receptive to Engels' expansion of Marx's more specific historical and economic analysis of capitalist society into a comprehensive world view.<sup>37</sup>

Like so much of the work of Marxists, *Anti-Dühring* began as a critique of a non-Marxist. In the preface to the second edition, Engels contended that he would not have undertaken such an enormous task, that is, presenting a comprehensive world view, had not Eugen Dühring pretended (in his *Course of Philosophy* and other works) to be able to explain the origins of chemistry, nature, society, and the universe in one fell swoop. Engels also contended that pure criticism was not enough; a counterexplanation, a positive presentation, had to be given. In this way, what began as an attack on a fuzzy-thinking, socialist pretender became an elaborate presentation of Marxism or, to use Engels' own words, "a conception of nature which is dialectical and at the same time materialist." Though he denied that in presenting this comprehensive world view he was outlining a fixed system, the net effect of *Anti-Dühring* was to provide Kautsky and others caught up in the Darwinian, positivist tenor of the times with an all-embracing, "scientific" theory that favored the deterministic over the voluntaristic implications of Marx's writing.<sup>38</sup>

Carried to an extreme, the deterministic implications of Engels' dialectical materialism could result in quietism. If the entire universe and all of human knowledge and experience could be explained by a comprehensive system based on Marxian principles, then the "scientific" prediction of the inevitable collapse of the capitalist system due to internal contradictions and the equally inevitable rise of the classless, postrevolutionary society reduced human activity to triviality. Of course, Marx's own writings were characterized by both a confident assertion of the inevitable collapse of bourgeois society and a powerful and pressing call for action, and therefore were ambiguous at best. The

danger of Engels' extrapolation was that its very comprehensiveness would swing the balance to determinism. However, Engels himself certainly did not carry his own analysis to this extreme. He continued to insist upon the need to develop working-class consciousness of the historical role of the proletariat through organization and political activity. As will be shown below, Kautsky, too, did not succumb to quietism, though his own lack of personal involvement in party and political activities and his strong humanitarian sympathies led him to put a good deal of weight on the deterministic aspects of Marxism. The extent to which he was influenced by his own natural-scientific inclinations and the importance of this for his interpretation of the nature and tactics of the SPD form the central issues in the debate over Kautsky's historical significance.<sup>39</sup>

Much of Kautsky's writing during the early eighties was aimed at integrating Marxism-according-to-Engels and Darwinism-according-to-Kautsky. In various articles in the *Sozialdemokrat* he discussed Darwin's work as a liberating force in the struggle against the "medieval-monarchist" world view, emphasized the natural origin of the human social instinct, and identified the origins of social and political organization with the social impulse of humans, rejecting the contract theory in the process. During the first three years of the *Neue Zeit*, he devoted a great deal of space to discussion of social instincts in animals and humans and attacked the Herbert Spencer school of Darwinian sociologists and its anarchist fellow travelers (as Kautsky saw them) for their insistence that the primitive human condition was individualistic and anarchistic. He argued that the earliest organization of humans, primitive communism, was based on equality and discipline backed by a powerful sense of collective solidarity. This line of argument reached a climax in a three-part article entitled "The Indian Question," which appeared in the *Neue Zeit* in 1885. Here Kautsky investigated the impact of the arrival of white Europeans on the native population of North America. After describing in rather idyllic terms the equality, security, and sometimes harsh discipline of the Indians' primitive-communistic society, he concluded that it was the rapacious greed of the individualistic whites that led them to devastate the land and murder the Indians. To the extent that it concentrated on these themes, Kautsky's work during the early eighties was a continuation of that of the middle and late seventies.<sup>40</sup>

But at the same time he was laboring to establish the natural-scientific validity of socialism, Kautsky was also using Marxian concepts and vocabulary more and more often. For instance, in "The Indian Question," Kautsky explained the defeat of the North American

natives by white Europeans in terms of technological superiority: "Not the better, stronger, more intelligent people wins, but the higher means of production." His political analysis was also increasingly couched in terms of class conflict and the class nature of the state; this tendency was particularly striking in a number of articles which appeared in the *Sozialdemokrat* in 1881. Unfortunately his efforts to integrate Darwin and Marx sometimes resulted in a curious muddle of apparent contradiction.<sup>41</sup>

In the first year of the *Neue Zeit*, Kautsky specifically linked the work of Marx and Darwin. In an article entitled "A Materialist Historian," he argued that some years before Darwin's theory emerged, Marx had placed history on a firmer basis by establishing "the development of the struggle for existence as the driving impulse [of history]." This was not, of course, the individualistic struggle which the Manchester school tried to pass off as natural law, but rather "the struggle of man as a social animal in the social community, in a word: the class struggle." Kautsky then went on to argue, with special reference to Buckle, that Marx had also dealt a death blow to the so-called materialist historians of the Enlightenment tradition. Marx had shown that ideas were not the motive force of history because ideas were only the result of conflicting class interests. Though "the momentarily prevailing intellectual tendencies" are as automatically the result of the class struggle as animal instincts are the result of the struggle for survival, human intellectual ideals change because class interests change with economic conditions. The Enlightenment materialist historians had sought for material causes in nature. When confronted with the historical phenomenon of change, these writers were forced to explain it in terms of ideals, since nature is relatively permanent in comparison with historical development. Kautsky concluded that only when Marx tied his materialist explanation to something that changed, to the means of production, was history given a useful and accurate materialist basis.<sup>42</sup>

Thus while trying to argue that social instincts are natural in humans, and that Marx's notion of class struggle was comparable to Darwin's notion of the struggle of species, Kautsky was also trying to make class struggle the result of the historically specific means of production—he wanted to have his cake and eat it too. If the social instincts of humans are "natural," and rapacious individualism only a perversion brought on by bourgeois capitalism, then these instincts cannot be historically specific also. In fact, Kautsky pointedly rejected the idea that relatively unchanging nature could explain the dynamics of history, while only slightly loosening his grip on Darwin. He could

have overcome the contradiction of his analysis simply by arguing, as he was later to do, that the social solidarity of the proletariat and the individualism of the bourgeoisie were both products of different aspects of capitalist production. This would have required that he abandon the natural-scientific basis of socialism he had worked so hard to establish. Instead, in 1883, he juxtaposed the contradictory views without reconciling them.

Beginning in late 1883, an ever increasing amount of Kautsky's time was devoted to Marx and an ever decreasing amount to natural-scientific topics. His writings on Marx had two aspects: simply to present Marx's work in shortened and popularized form, and to counter the arguments of Marx's critics and of those authors whom Engels and Kautsky perceived as competitors of Marx in socialist theory. The first aspect is best represented by two works: the German edition of Marx's *Poverty of Philosophy* (Marx wrote it originally in French), translated by Kautsky and Bernstein and published in 1885; and Kautsky's *Economic Doctrines of Karl Marx*, which first appeared in 1887. The latter was one of the most important works in establishing Kautsky's reputation as a leading Marxian theorist. Within four years of its initial publication, it had been translated into Russian, Serbo-Croatian, Swedish, Polish, and Czech, and since has been translated into at least eighteen languages, many several times. *Economic Doctrines* originated as a response to Gabriel Deville's abridged and popularized edition of *Capital* which was first published in France in 1883. At first Kautsky and Bernstein set out to prepare a German translation of Deville's book. But they soon abandoned this project, in order to concentrate more fully on *Poverty of Philosophy*, and because Kautsky, encouraged by Engels, had decided to write his own exposition of Marx's economic thought. Kautsky wrote *Economic Doctrines* in London with regular and important assistance from Engels. No work more clearly demonstrates the close cooperation of Kautsky and Engels than this one.<sup>43</sup>

In *The Economic Doctrines of Karl Marx*, Kautsky attempted to summarize the most significant economic features of Marx's "Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy," "Wage Labor and Capital," *Capital*, and *Poverty of Philosophy*. *Economic Doctrines* did not present new statistical evidence nor did it discuss economic literature. While keeping formulae to a minimum, Kautsky carefully and straightforwardly defined critical terms like *commodity*, *profit*, *surplus value*, *socially necessary labor*, and *constant* and *variable capital*. *Economic Doctrines* began with a very brief historical review of the development of capitalism and then described the process of capitalist production and

the effects of capitalism on labor. Kautsky strongly emphasized the historical specificity of capitalism as an instrument of historical development. This work was a lucid and fairly comprehensive summary, though not an imaginative extension, of Marx's economic analysis. The large number of translations and editions of *Economic Doctrines* attests to its widespread influence.<sup>44</sup>

The second aspect of Kautsky's work on Marx during the middle and late eighties was the criticism of non-Marxist writers, which was almost always coupled with at least some positive presentation of Marx. Encouraged by Engels, he took up the attack in Marx's name, battling all pretenders to the title of scientific socialist. One curious side to the criticism was that while both Kautsky and Engels privately insisted that the men they were attacking did not constitute serious threats to the unity and strength of the working-class party, both men nonetheless expended a great deal of energy in their attacks. In part such attacks served as cover for political criticism of the Bismarckian state; in part they were the product of the insecurity of German Marxists, who realized that theoretically the party was still extremely eclectic; in part they were simply excuses to promote the cause of Marxism. Kautsky tended to use two tactics in these criticisms; the most common was to accuse opponents of misunderstanding Marx. Often this criticism was justified, as when Albert Schaffle, a university professor and Austrian government minister, took Marx's value theory to be the basis for an assault on capitalist society, rather than a descriptive analysis of the nature of capitalism. The other tactic was to identify opponents as idealists who ignored or did not understand the true nature of modern society. Finally, Kautsky usually implied that those who disagreed with Marx were at best opportunists and at worst lackeys of the ruling class.<sup>45</sup>

Kautsky did not merely conduct one-sided criticisms; the *Neue Zeit* was the site of give-and-take between proponents of various theories. The first major theoretical dispute, in 1884-1885, began with an assault by Kautsky on the ideas of Karl Johann Rodbertus-Jagetzow (1805-1875). As with much of his writing from this period, Kautsky was guided in detail by Engels. The draft articles were sent to London and returned with manuscript comments and letters of criticism. The purpose of these articles, and the reason Engels took such an active interest in them, was to counter the seductive appeal of the Rodbertus brand of socialism that postulated a major role for the German state as protector of the true interests of the workers. Beginning with Ferdinand Lassalle, those who claimed to speak for the toilers of the nation had frequently included strong nationalistic appeals and calls

for state aid. Although both Engels and Kautsky claimed in public and private that Rodbertus and his followers posed little immediate threat within the German party, the vigor with which the attack was undertaken revealed the bravado of these claims. At the same time, this series of articles was as much a presentation of Marxian theory as it was an attack on Rodbertus and as such forms an integral part of Kautsky's program of propagating Marxism among German socialists. Because of the restraints imposed by the antisocialist law, Kautsky felt compelled to limit his specific political attacks on Rodbertus's theories. He was, however, able to discuss politics, albeit indirectly and not in terms of immediate issues. This debate reveals the extent to which Kautsky was concerned with political matters as well as with more abstract theoretical discussion.<sup>46</sup>

Carl August Schramm, an academic follower of Rodbertus, was Kautsky's antagonist. The discussion began with a two-part article by Kautsky that ostensibly reviewed Rodbertus's posthumously published work, *Capital: Four Social Letters to v. Kirchmann* (1884). Schramm responded with a critique, to which Kautsky replied, which in turn prompted an answer from Schramm, and finally the series ended with Kautsky's article, "Final Word."<sup>47</sup> Victory for Kautsky was a foregone conclusion, since the journal was his and he had the power to cut off debate whenever he chose. On the other hand, he was in no way required to give Schramm space for response; he did so in order to fulfill the original intention of allowing appropriate response to polemical articles in the *Neue Zeit* itself, that is, of providing a forum of rational theoretical discussion. Kautsky was undoubtedly further encouraged to publish Schramm's articles once the paucity of their content became evident.

Though both men engaged in nit-picking and *ad hominem* arguments, only Kautsky also offered substantive criticism. His first contention was that Marx was a materialist and Rodbertus a philosophical idealist who tried to explain social reality by "eternal" concepts. Methodologically, Kautsky contended, Rodbertus converted the abstraction necessary for good scientific analysis into construction of artificial concepts, like "national income" and "national capital," rather than concepts that were firmly rooted in the real world. This idealist fabrication led Rodbertus to conclude that organization of the working class and limitations on the work day would not alleviate the disadvantages of the workers; state action was needed to limit the exploitation of the proletariat by capitalism while preserving private property. Kautsky felt this revealed a silly disregard for the necessities of capitalist production. His major political objection was that



Rodbertus stood "on monarchist and nationalist grounds," that is, he accepted the authoritarian, Junker-dominated state of Germany and sought only to reform it. With what for him was the clinching argument, Kautsky concluded that Rodbertus, far from being the founder of scientific socialism as his followers claimed, was a "conservative utopian" interested only in winning the support of the workers for the large landowners' struggle with the modern industrial bourgeoisie.

Opening his first response with "people who live in glass houses should not throw stones," Schramm refused to defend Rodbertus against Kautsky's specific criticisms, but rather argued that Marx and Rodbertus were not all that different. He contended that both Marx and Rodbertus sought socialism and based their critiques of contemporary society on abstractions like the primitive, isolated producer. Both men were brilliant political economists and social critics, so why not accept both, just as one appreciates two good poets of different styles. Schramm held that Kautsky was warped by dogmatic Marxism and implied that he had purposely misinterpreted Rodbertus to exaggerate his case. The only argument Schramm put forth that was even marginally substantive was his rejection of the Marxian conception of the mode of production as the fundamental determinant of the social and political superstructure of society. He argued that other, broader, though undefined, material and ideal determinants were also important. In the end Schramm's defense consisted of a series of unsubstantiated assertions; he did not attempt the sort of economic analysis Kautsky offered. Kautsky countered his opponent's contention that both Marx and Rodbertus could be honored by reminding Schramm that in poetry beauty, not scientific truth, was at stake. If two scientists defend opposing interpretations of the same phenomenon, both cannot be right.

Kautsky's presentation included a review of Marx's discussion of modern society and history. When Schramm equated Marx with Rodbertus, Kautsky strongly emphasized the historical quality of Marx's definitions and critique. He flatly and convincingly rejected Schramm's contention that Marx started his economic analysis from consideration of the abstract, isolated individual. According to Kautsky, Marx recognized as no analyst before him that there were no "eternal" considerations, that the human world was a dynamic one in which "eternal" qualities were totally lacking. This emphasis on historicity and relativity indicated that by this time Kautsky had come to view development in modern capitalist society in terms contrary to rigid "natural necessity." The picture he drew here was not analogous

to the Darwinian conception of biological development. Rather Kautsky emphasized the historical specificity of the Marxian analysis and also its methodological utility. Early in 1885, in a review of an anonymous book entitled *The Aristocracy of Intellect as a Solution to the Social Question*, Kautsky very specifically rejected the notion that laws of the organic realm could be applied to the realm of human social activity:

It is a scientific axiom that laws which are found for one area of human knowledge cannot without further ado be carried over to other areas. It seems that each is entirely independent, that laws which are characteristic of organic nature, for example those of heredity, natural selection, and so forth, may not be used in chemistry or astronomy. Strangely, it is today in some circles not only considered acceptable, but as true science if one applies the laws of organic nature to explanations of social conditions. Thus is society considered as an organism, like the family or a cell, thus are social phenomena, which only belong to a specific historical epoch, placed on a level with natural phenomena, as for example when the Manchester school is connected with natural selection.<sup>48</sup>

By 1885, Kautsky had clearly broken with the school, as represented by Büchner, Haeckel, and Spencer, which contended that human society was merely an extension of the animal world and similarly dominated by natural law. Though he still held that humans were "naturally" social, and that this inclination was reinforced in the proletariat under the specific social conditions that prevailed in a capitalist society, he felt that the laws governing human society were distinct from those operating in the organic, animal realm. That Kautsky perceived the workings of human society in terms of laws at all is a reflection of his commitment to a rationalistic, materialist world view, but he was not simply expanding Darwinian biological concepts to apply them to human activity, and he specifically denied that such an expansion was justifiable. He had moved away from his implicit position of the seventies and early eighties.

Earlier Kautsky had tended to view socioeconomic developments as something that disrupted natural human instincts. Thus the extreme competitiveness and individualism of the capitalist system destroyed the social instincts of humans and created among the bourgeoisie, the petite bourgeoisie, and the peasantry the struggle of all against all. This view is reminiscent of that of Rousseau and the late Enlightenment and many of the romanticists that "natural man" had somehow been

perverted by the emergence of organized society and the state; it is also a view frequently held by anarchists. During his early years as a socialist writer, Kautsky had been influenced by both romantic and anarchist notions, and his conception of the relationship between human nature and society reflected these influences. By the mid-1880s, he had converted to a materialist view that did not see social organization as a perversion of nature, but simply explained human action in terms of social conditions, without any particular reference to the mythical primeval character of humans. Under the influence of Marxism, he assumed that immediate social conditions take precedence over any supposed natural attributes people may have, thus rendering superfluous his earlier contention of the naturalness of the social instinct. Certainly he continued to feel that somehow the proletariat was more natural, and therefore, given his natural-scientific prejudices, better than other classes because of its social instincts. But this line of argument virtually disappeared from his writings as he concentrated more and more on economic and political topics.<sup>49</sup>

Following the debate with Schramm, Kautsky began to pursue a much more consistent Marxian course. In an 1886 article, he discussed Chinese village communism in terms very similar to those employed in the earlier article on the North American Indians. But in this article he concluded by pointing out three characteristics of this social form: it prevented the emergence of a proletariat, it gave rise to an unbelievably strong conservatism, and it was "the firmest basis of oriental despotism." The lingering romantic idealism evidenced in "The Indian Question" was gone, and the Chinese village social organization of the late nineteenth century was dealt with as an historical construct. Finally, in an 1887 article, Kautsky argued that the failure of Cabetian communes in the United States did not prove that communism was hopeless. Rather, he continued, the petit bourgeois handicraftsmen who made up these communes had not been conditioned by their means of existence to accept the high degree of discipline and cooperation required to make such an experience succeed. He concluded that "the mode of production . . . influences all of humanity." From the mid-1880s to the years after the First World War and the Russian Revolution, he emphasized this sort of Marxian analysis at the expense of his earlier natural-scientific bent.<sup>50</sup>

Kautsky perceived himself as primarily a popularizer and defender of Marxism and not a creative or innovative thinker in economics and general theory. Any evaluation of him must be based on an awareness that when he began espousing Marxism, it was still novel and little known. Certainly Kautsky did not add significantly to Marxism, either

as a socioeconomic theorist or as a revolutionary ideologist. But he did form an essential link between the theoretical works of Marx and Engels and twentieth-century revolutionary movements by popularizing and establishing the validity of Marx's analysis of bourgeois capitalism. In literally hundreds of books and articles from the 1880s on, Kautsky labored to explain what Marx had written and to show that the Marxian analysis was correct. Later, and often more imaginative, Marxian theorists were indebted to Kautsky as the man who assured them an audience by arousing widespread interest in Marxism and, in the *Neue Zeit*, providing the world's first journal devoted to the propagation of Marxism.

In addition to his *Economic Doctrines* and his theoretical polemics, Kautsky promoted acceptance of Marxism by German socialists through his economic articles in the *Neue Zeit*. In these articles he presented a variety of statistics from official sources to show that economic concentration, overproduction, periodic crisis, and the immiserization and proletarianization of the working classes were occurring. In 1883 he demonstrated from official statistics that both mortality and disability rates were increasing among Prussia's miners; that in the German state of Saxony the percentage of the populace receiving an income of less than 800 marks per year was steadily increasing; and that productivity, production, and mechanization were increasing in the German sugar and the American iron and steel industries. In 1885, by a careful and sophisticated reading of the 1880 United States census, Kautsky disproved Albert Schäffle's assertion that the number of small agrarian holdings was on the increase in America. And in several articles from 1887 through 1889, he argued vigorously that industrial capitalism was killing itself because "the greater the overproduction, the greater the competition, [and] the stronger is every impulse which goads greater productivity and economy within the factories." As a whole, these articles constitute an extensive indictment of capitalism as seen by a Marxian intellectual, and they were exactly the sort of propaganda that impressed the sympathetic but uncommitted readers of the *Neue Zeit*.<sup>51</sup>

The one area of economics in which Kautsky made an original contribution during the 1880s was the discussion of colonialism (he did not use the word *imperialism* until after 1890). In his first article on colonialism, which appeared in one of Karl Höchberg's journals in 1880, he identified two classes of colonies: exploitative colonies and work colonies. The former he condemned without reservation because their only purpose was to plunder natural resources, and their effect was usually to devastate the native population for the advantage of a

very few entrepreneurs and traders. He gave conditional approval to work colonies, those intended to be permanently settled and worked by citizens of the colonizing country, but the conditions he imposed (social-democratic political freedoms and economic prosperity for all settlers) were prohibitive. These conditions were not realized in the colonizing countries themselves, as Kautsky well knew. In an 1882 letter to Engels, he suggested that under certain conditions, as when the colonizing power was industrially and politically advanced and the colony backward, perhaps colonization could be progressive if it brought capitalism with it. But this was the only time during the eighties that he even suggested that something good could come from colonies. In a number of *Neue Zeit* articles he developed a careful, enlightened, and consistently hostile critique of nineteenth-century European colonial expansion.<sup>52</sup>

While Kautsky recognized that colonies had been a necessary source of original capital accumulation during the fifteenth through the seventeenth centuries, he felt that the other important aspect of colonies, as markets for contemporary capitalism, was quickly being exhausted. In the *Neue Zeit* articles of the eighties, he expanded on his original distinction between work colonies and exploitative colonies and condemned both on the basis of German economic self-interest and on humanitarian grounds. He now rejected work colonies without qualification for four reasons. First, he did not feel they were necessary to relieve overpopulation, since Germany was not overpopulated. Besides, by careful and imaginative analysis of population, election, and emigration statistics, he showed that in fact heaviest emigration originated in areas of low population. He also demonstrated that, with few exceptions, emigration was not a safety valve for discontent since it was highest in areas that voted most heavily for progovernment parties and lowest where the major opposition party, the SPD, was strongest. Second, Kautsky argued that work colonies would not advance the cause of German nationalism since they either failed or, when successful, the settlers developed new national loyalties. Third, most areas of the world suitable for the establishment of work colonies, that is, areas with moderate climates, were already taken. Therefore, for Germany to settle such lands would require either a major war of conquest or a tremendous number of German immigrants. And finally, Kautsky quite sensibly pointed out that even if work colonies could now be founded, there was no guarantee that they would trade exclusively with Germany.<sup>53</sup>

Kautsky saved his harshest criticism for exploitative colonies. In vivid terms he argued that these colonies, which were usually based on slave

or near-slave labor, brutalized both the colonizers and the native population and often led to the extermination of the latter. This brutalization was the result of several things. For one, living conditions were so harsh in exploitative colonies that only the most brutal and uncultured of the white Europeans went there. Kautsky was particularly appalled by the exploitative and inhumane relationships between the white male colonizers and their purchased native concubines. He quoted with approval the eighteenth-century French expression, "La canaille de l'Europe, c'est l'aristocratie des Indes." He also argued that by their very nature exploitative colonies encouraged the white Europeans to seek the greatest possible profit in the shortest possible time without regard to long-term developments. The fact that such colonies were profitable for only a very few merely drove those who failed to greater ruthlessness and inhumanity. But perhaps Kautsky's most perceptive critique of both types of colonies was based on what we would today call a conflict of cultures and values. Though he did not use the terminology of present-day sociologists and historians, he nonetheless discussed the confrontation between white Europeans from industrially advanced countries and less advanced Africans and North American Indians in a strikingly modern way. He pointed out that in all the debates over colonization, one thing was never mentioned, namely the rights of the native population. What to Europeans seemed sparsely populated or even empty land was often as heavily populated as hunting land can be. North American Indians, for instance, had no concept of landownership that allowed them to understand what Europeans were doing in the New World. With arguments like these, Kautsky revealed his strong humanitarianism and his own sensitive awareness of cultural specificity. He recognized the right of the native populations not to be westernized, Christianized, and modernized, though his discussion was also marked by a feeling that colonization was inevitable.<sup>54</sup>

As with other issues discussed in the *Neue Zeit*, Kautsky did not completely ignore the political implications of the colonial issue. In fact, the distinction he made between work and exploitative colonies grew out of a need to combat German colonial enthusiasts who were clamoring for funds and military support from the state to further the cause of the German Empire. Many of Kautsky's articles appeared at times when colonialism was a hot political issue. For instance, his analysis of German emigration appeared in the spring of 1885, at the same time that the bill for state subsidization of German steamship lines was being considered in the Reichstag. One of Kautsky's points was that the procolonialists confused the benefits of the two kinds of



colonies (such as getting rich and emigration by the lower classes), while they failed to mention the disadvantages (such as brutalization and failure). From his analysis of colonialism, he drew two political conclusions that continue to be echoed in fact and theory in the twentieth century. First, he predicted that the all-too-gradual modernization of the colonized countries would eventually yield native rebellion against domination by the Europeans. Second, arguing that they faced a common exploiter in the capitalist class, he discussed the common interests of, and a possible coalition between, the industrial proletariat of the European nations and the natives of the colonies.<sup>55</sup>

Politics had a persistent way of intruding into most of Kautsky's writing of the 1880s. Powerful personal disinclination, the original design for the *Neue Zeit*, and caution demanded by the antisocialist law combined to keep him from concentrating on political matters, and yet he constantly felt compelled to discuss politics and considered politics a fundamental part of the working-class movement. Furthermore, he was convinced that political issues were too important to be left to the politicians alone, because they tended to overemphasize practical, day-to-day matters at the expense of long-range theoretical considerations. He argued that theory was vitally important to politics because it allowed a party to perceive future trends in society and economics and to mold its policies to conform to these trends. Kautsky also felt that one of the major strengths of the international socialist movement was its theoretical ability; he was especially scornful of English socialists whom he saw as purely empirical and thus much inferior to the Marxists. Finally, though like most Marxists he held that the trade unions were schools for socialists, he was the first to identify the tendency of trade unions to ignore larger political issues while concentrating on more immediate and narrower economic matters. In an 1884 letter to Engels, Kautsky deplored the lack of theoretical concern within German socialist circles despite continued trade-union activity. Anticipating almost exactly Lenin's later and more famous dictum, Kautsky wrote: "And not all questions can be decided by class instinct alone, so much the more as the trade-union movement turns increasingly into trade-unionist ruts." In other words, without theoretical guidance, practical activity does not yield socialist consciousness. Engels responded that he felt Kautsky was too harsh in his judgment of the German masses.<sup>56</sup>

Much of what Kautsky wrote on politics during the first year in Zurich was directed against the anarchists and was therefore moderate in tone. But he soon found himself on the side of the radicals in opposition to the moderates of the German party, so his political

writing once again assumed the radical tone of, though a different content from, his pre-Zurich flirtation with anarchism. On the other hand, with the possible exception of those articles devoted to speculation about the nature of postrevolutionary society, Kautsky's political writings of the eighties tended to be very realistic and, on occasion, surprisingly practical. Balancing this realism, however, was a strong inclination to optimism about the coming of the revolution and about the political power of the socialists vis-à-vis the German state. In the spring of 1884, Kautsky predicted in a letter to Engels that the upcoming election would be a good one for the SPD, which it was. But he also felt that there was some chance of getting the antisocialist law moderated or even dropped, which did not happen until 1890. Kautsky added, "however I must mention that Ede [Bernstein] considers me an optimist." A further measure of this optimism was his prediction three weeks later that even with the antisocialist law, the rising tide of public support for the socialists would make the German government think twice about prohibiting the publication of a new book by Engels. Engels himself was less sanguine about the prospect of publication.<sup>57</sup>

At times during the 1880s Kautsky's political views were very simple and even dogmatic. Politics for him was the class struggle, and all states were class states which ruled for the dominant economic class. Although he recognized that when confronted with regional, quasi-feudal forces, the proletariat was oriented toward the national whole, he insisted that nationalism was an essentially modern, bourgeois phenomenon. Only when nationalism was a revolutionary force was the proletariat nationalistic; once national particularism became a fetter on further development, the proletariat became internationalist and the national state its enemy. This line of reasoning led Kautsky to a blanket rejection of nationalization, or state socialism as bourgeois critics then called it. His opposition was summarized in the following syllogism: "State socialism is socialism by the state and for the state. It is socialism by the government and for the government. It is therefore socialism by the ruling class and for the ruling class." He was especially direct and vehement in his opposition to the German state. He wrote to Bebel that "opposition to Bismarck's representative system is an essential element of our movement." The Prussian Junkers who dominated the German government, he contended, were motivated by "petty vindictiveness" and pursued "guttersnipe politics." He also had the pseudorepresentative governments of Austria and Germany in mind when he referred to parliamentarism as a "comical farce."<sup>58</sup>

On the other hand, Kautsky was also capable of subtler and more

careful political analysis. For instance, he was one of the first Marxists to contend explicitly that the ideal government for most of Europe's bourgeoisie was not a republic but a constitutional monarchy. Marx himself had tended to posit French republican forms as the purest form of bourgeois political domination. Kautsky held that notions such as the general franchise, universal (male) military obligation, and compulsory education were not ideals of the greater part of the European bourgeoisie, but imports via France from "the great North American republic." He also appreciated that after the proletarian, socialist revolution the state could not immediately be discarded. Some form of state would have to be used by the proletariat to complete the revolution. The abolition of the state would be the last, not the first act of the proletarian regime. Furthermore, he was undogmatic enough to realize that though the classical form of the modern state might be the bourgeois national state, "the classical form exists only as a tendency, it seldom develops completely purely."<sup>59</sup>

The subtleties of Kautsky's political writing derived from his basic awareness of the complexities of modern society. While he recognized a general tendency toward increasing bifurcation into a massive proletariat and a tiny bourgeoisie, he consistently argued that it was only a tendency, that in fact capitalist society consisted of a great variety of interests. And the variety was not incidental, rather "the capitalist mode of production rests on the opposition of the different classes; on the opposition of tendencies within the same class; on the opposition of the different industrial states." He was also fully aware of the intricacies and internal conflicts of state governments: "In a government . . . by no means a single will rules, and its actions are by no means completely thought out, deliberately applied, and directed to one particular end. Different influences and tendencies make themselves felt in varying strengths, and often disrupt the unity of will of the government in the severest way. And the application of these desires through the bureaucracy does not always conform entirely with the intentions of the government. Every bureaucratic body has its own life, its own traditions, which often prove more powerful than the will of the government."<sup>60</sup>

During 1881, in the midst of the debate within German socialism between the radicals and the moderates, Kautsky formulated his conception of the nature and function of the party, a conception he was to hold to for the rest of his life with very little alteration. The climate of the dispute caused him to adopt a tone of exaggerated militancy that he was to drop in later, less tense, discussions. But essentially only the tone changed, not the fundamental analysis. Most of his contributions to

the on-going debate appeared in the official party paper, the *Sozialdemokrat*, where they often elicited lively responses from the moderates.

Kautsky began by defining social democracy as a revolutionary party, not because it relied on violence, but because it held that "the social question" could not be solved within existing society. He went on to define revolution as an event so elemental that it could not be decreed. He named three essential conditions for revolution: a general and profound discontent engendered by economic and political pressures; a catalytic event, such as famine or war; and the inability of existing states to cope with the revolutionary situation. The role of a social democratic party, once these conditions existed, was to lead the revolution, preventing unnecessary chaos and ensuring victory for the workers. Therefore, the function of the party was "not to organize the revolution, but to organize for the revolution; not to make the revolution, but to use it." Kautsky cited three means by which the party could organize for the revolution: participation in elections, not because socialism could be achieved through parliaments, but because of the propaganda and agitation value of elections; promotion of good labor legislation, to prove the goodwill of the party and to increase the sense of solidarity and strength among the workers; and support for trade-union organization and strikes.<sup>61</sup>

Largely to combat moderate tendencies within the party that still hoped to tie the workers' movement to the oppositional bourgeoisie, and also to counter governmental and conservative propaganda, Kautsky specifically denied that a bourgeois-dominated republic was the first step to socialism. The bourgeoisie, he argued, had never really been republican and certainly was not now republican in Germany; rather it supported a military monarchy. He rejected the idea that social democracy was an extension of bourgeois democracy, though both called for freedom and they had fought together in 1848. But then the German bourgeoisie had been revolutionary, he continued, and now it was reactionary. Though both parties still called for freedom, social democracy sought freedom from the domination of one class or one person, while the bourgeoisie sought absolute individual freedom. Kautsky argued that the latter was in fact anarchy, an unnatural condition for humans and a farce given the technical conditions of production. The bourgeoisie really sought only the freedom of entrepreneurs and landowners to exploit the lower classes. Obviously Kautsky had put the cart before the horse here. In Germany the socialists were not allowed to speak, meet, or write freely. Rejecting the value of these traditional, bourgeois, individual freedoms meant

rejecting not only the function of the party as he himself had defined it, but also his own role as party propagandist. Robert Seidel, a moderate socialist, took Kautsky to task for having implicitly rejected the traditional liberal freedoms.<sup>62</sup>

The defense Kautsky offered following Seidel's critique was somewhat feeble. First he claimed he had neglected the traditional freedoms because they were so fundamental to the socialist program that mentioning them was unnecessary; then he offered arguments that were at the same time too extreme and too highly qualified to be convincing. His emphasis was on the collective, as represented by the party, as opposed to the individual: "Vis-à-vis the totality, the individual has no rights, only duties." He then identified the party with the organized and conscious part of the working class, the class interests of the workers with the interests of the party, and concluded that committed individuals owed the party all, the party owed nothing to the individuals in it. Now this was all rather fearsome and totalitarian sounding, and taken alone certainly suggested a rather extreme conception of the party and the role of individuals. However, Kautsky continued his discussion by saying that the only limit to the subjugation of the individual to the whole was equality: "the totality may demand no more from any single individual than from all the others." He also added that reason was "obviously" also a limiting factor, and discussed restrictions on speech, press, assembly, and even religion as unreasonable and violations of the precept of equality.<sup>63</sup> In the end Kautsky backed down, while trying to preserve face with sharp words. He was forced to admit, in effect, that to a certain extent social democracy was both the logical and the historical consequence of bourgeois democracy. The more moderate content of his contribution to this debate was a truer reflection of his long-term political views than was the extreme language. But the extreme language also reflected an inclination on his part that persisted through most of his long association with the SPD. In public defense of his positions, Kautsky tended to exaggerate his real feelings for the sake of propaganda and dramatic effect. This tendency became even more marked in the years from 1890 to 1914, when he clearly viewed himself as the defender of Marxian orthodoxy against deviations to the right and to the left.

That Kautsky's extreme language in the debate over the nature and function of the party was more the result of the circumstances of the argument than of his rational analysis of the issues is further attested by another persistent strain in most of his works in the 1880s, namely a strong humanitarianism. In his earliest work, Kautsky identified the victory of socialism with the victory of humanity. In 1880, he wrote

effusively of the working class as "the pioneer of a new age . . . which establishes the 'kingdom of God' on earth and which will make all people into humans!" His powerful condemnation of the violence of Austrian anarchists was accompanied by this caution: "Social Democracy is a party of human love, and it must always remain conscious of its character even in the midst of the most frenzied political fights." His humanitarian strain was most evident in works in which he analyzed social problems. For instance, after a careful review of statistics on the mortality rates of indigent and orphaned children cared for in institutions, he concluded that the care of such children was inhumane because it did not provide love. Why not, he asked, support indigent mothers so they will not have to give up their children? Why not finance foster parents? Kautsky also railed against the so-called Christian morality that shamed unwed mothers into giving up their children. In a plaintive plea for greater humanity, he called for tolerance in such situations. Indeed, Kautsky was always very sensitive to human suffering, which he blamed largely on the capitalist system, and saw socialism as a potential force for humanizing the world. This humanitarian sympathy accounted for his strong attachment to the works of George Sand and later caused him to balk in the face of the apparent necessity of revolutionary violence. While strong humanitarianism may have made him a less effective revolutionary, it also rendered his writing sometimes startlingly modern in tone.<sup>64</sup>

Finally, something must be said of Kautsky's historical writings during the 1880s. If in politics he identified Marxism with the class struggle, in a more general sense he identified it with the materialist conception of history. He generally considered himself a historian first and foremost, and as an old man he felt that his historical works were "much more original and theoretically significant" than his economic works. His major histories of the period were *Thomas More and His Utopia* (1888) and *Class Struggles in the Age of the French Revolution* (1889), both of which were based largely on research done at the British Museum and written under Engels' tutelage. Kautsky also wrote several articles that later served as a basis for his studies of the origins of Christianity and the Reformation in Central Europe. These articles included "The Origins of Biblical Prehistory," "On the Luther Jubilee," "The Origins of Christianity," and "The Miners and the Peasant Wars." A very early and forgettable effort yielded *Ireland: An Historical Sketch* (1880), which was little more than a summation of the work of others.<sup>65</sup>

*Thomas More* seems a curious work today. Why Kautsky chose this preeminently Catholic and elitist thinker and statesman as one of the

two most important precursors of modern socialism (Thomas Müntzer was the other) is not entirely clear. In this work Kautsky discussed the age of humanism and the Reformation in terms of the developing conflict between nascent mercantile capitalism and feudalism dominated by the pope. He then presented More's background—a classical scholar, a long-time representative of the London merchants in the English court, and an opponent of absolutism who sought to restrain the king without appealing to the populace. But the major aim of the book was to present More's *Utopia* as the first socialist work to foresee the demise of capitalism and speculate about the nature of the postcapitalist society. With an impressive disregard for More's dramatic historical legacy, Kautsky argued that had More not written *Utopia*, he would have quickly lapsed into obscurity. By crediting to More's genius all the things he liked in *Utopia* and passing over all the things he did not like as regrettable consequences of the age, he managed to eulogize a man who condoned slavery, flogging, and the burning of heretics, who denied the right of the general populace to have a say in government, and who viewed the world through traditional Catholic eyes.<sup>66</sup> The book is still interesting because Kautsky went beyond the theological discussions that usually dominated biographies of More at that time, but it failed to make a very convincing case for him as a precursor of modern socialism.

*Class Struggles* was an effort to analyze the enormously complicated events of the French Revolution from 1788 to the ascension of Napoleon. Unlike *Thomas More*, this book dealt with issues vital to the workers' movement and for this reason was more widely read and influential than Kautsky's first effort at biography. Furthermore, *Class Struggles* was written in late 1888 and early 1889, in the midst of Kautsky's divorce and the cooling of relations with Engels. The latter read *Class Struggles* in manuscript form and sent Kautsky a very sharply worded critique. Kautsky incorporated almost all of the detailed criticisms into the final draft, and Engels' sharp tone elicited humble and grateful responses from Kautsky, who clearly realized why the critique was so harsh.<sup>67</sup>

In *Class Struggles*, Kautsky offered a very careful and reasonable analysis of the economic interests that motivated the various classes and groups in French society during the Revolution. He claimed, in the 1908 preface to a new edition, that the work was intended to prove that "dogmatic Marxism" was capable of subtle arguments, and in fact that the Marxists, recognizing the economic complexities of society, could write much more accurate history than those historians who only looked at surface events. Kautsky showed that the nobility was split into



those who supported the court, those who opposed it, and those who went over to the side of the Third Estate. He discussed the many layers of the Third Estate and emphasized the importance of peasant and street-rabble uprisings in sustaining and advancing the revolution. Though his sympathies were obviously with the *sans-culottes*, he viewed the sequence of events in the Revolution as the inevitable results of the immature development of the French bourgeoisie and as a necessary step in the progression toward modern capitalist society. *Class Struggles* was a convincing example of the utility of the materialist conception of history and its potential as a weapon in the orthodox struggle against both those who would merge the workers' movement with the bourgeoisie and those who argued that the workers should have nothing to do with any other group. It was a fitting last work for this decade in which Kautsky prepared for the role of international arbiter of Marxism that would be his after he returned to Stuttgart in 1890.<sup>68</sup>